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TWO SERMONS

ON

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SLAVERY AND ITS HERO-VICTIM.

Nathaniel Hall

59

THE INIQUITY:

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER,

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ON SUNDAY, DEC. 11, 1859.

BY NATHANIEL HALL.

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DORCHESTER, Dec. 13, 1859.

Rev. NATHANIEL HALL.

DEAR SIR,— We are desirous of having your very acceptable discourses of last Sunday preserved in a permanent form, that they may thereby reach many who have not had an opportunity of hearing them; and we feel sure that we express the wishes of a large number of your parishioners and friends in asking copies of them for publication.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

THOS. C. WALES.
THOMAS GROOM.
WM. E. COFFIN.
WILLIAM POPE, JR.
FRANKLIN KING.

JNO. H. ROBINSON.
ELISHA T. LORING.
DANIEL DENNY.
FRED. W. G. MAY.
HENRY G. DENNY.

DORCHESTER, Dec. 15, 1859.

GENTLEMEN,—

In deference to your expressed judgment of them, I place the Sermons you request for publication, in your hands, for that purpose,—though written with no such thought.

Very respectfully,

NATHANIEL HALL.

To THOS. C. WALES and others.

S E R M O N.

Luke x. 27: "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF."

John xiii. 34: "A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE UNTO YOU, THAT YE LOVE ONE
ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU."

FOR reasons which the past week has furnished, I take for my subject, this morning, that always, to so many, distasteful one,—now, to some of you, I fear, more especially so,—the subject of American Slavery.

I am happy in the belief that I possess your confidence in the worthiness of my motive in presenting this subject in the past, so far at least as to lead you to bear with me now, in the persuasion that only a feeling of bounden allegiance to a great and holy cause impels me, and my desire, in the present excited condition of the public mind, the conflict of opinion and feeling among equally wise, and, I doubt not, equally conscientious men, to throw my contribution of light, though it be but a single ray, on the path of duty respecting it. I feel that it is the pulpit's *time* to speak; that, instead of withholding itself because

of this excitement around it, all the more for this should it speak. It is *always* its time to speak on this subject. It is a subject bound upon it by most solemn obligations. And had it, the pulpit of the Free States, been true to those obligations in the past; had it not been faithless to the great moral question of the age in this country; had it not, as a general fact (I say not from what motives; God knows), had it not practically ignored it, and given it over to the politician, and to those outside the church, who have taken it up because the church would not; had the pulpit lent itself with heart and might to the antislavery movement,—I believe, before God, this most unhappy and fearfully threatening condition of things now upon us would never have existed. And, in saying this, the assumption is not that preachers have an especial competency to discuss the subject, in all its relations; that there is more wisdom and intelligence in the pulpit for this than in the hall of legislation, the forum, the editorial chair. Let it be granted that there is far less. The subject has other than political and economic relations, which are likely in the places named to be the only ones discussed, and not without partisan and unworthy bias. The subject has relations also to morality and religion,—most intimate, most direct; and, supposing *these* relations to get a fair consideration in the places spoken of, how could it supersede the neces-

sity of the pulpit's discussing them, or excuse its silence upon them? But we well know they do *not* get such discussion there; that these relations are very generally put out of sight, as if they did not exist; or are recognized but to be scoffed at. The preacher should — his calling presumes it of him — see more clearly than other men what the claims of morality and religion are with regard to this question, as to others. Freed by his position from an active participation in the dizzying pursuit of life's meaner good; dealing by profession with absolute and unchanging verities, — he occupies, surely, a vantage-ground above other men for such clearer vision. Should he not tell what he sees? The *theory* of the pulpit is, that it stands amidst the eddying tides and blinding mists of the mortal shores, a lighthouse, flamed by the Eternal Truth, to warn and guide the endangered voyager; to remind and keep him in sight of interests higher than earth's, and more lasting than time's; that it stands a present Christ, a perpetually vocalized Gospel, with its pointings to duty, with its affirmations of the higher law, with its rebukes of sin, alike private and public, no less than with its consoling assurances, its cheering hopes, and heavenly promises.

Will men never choose to discriminate between the treatment of this subject politically and the treatment of it ethically? which latter is all the pulpit claims a

right to do. Will they never cease to assume, that, because it has become involved with party politics, it has therefore passed from the province of the religious teacher; and that all treatment of it by him, however strictly on his own ground, is entitled to the epithet of “political preaching”? I undertake to say that there never was a more senseless assumption put forth in all Christendom,— one more to be resisted, if need were, to the very death,— than that the pulpit, standing as the visible exponent of God’s truth and law, should have nothing to say in reference to the fact that millions of human beings, in the nation in which it stands, are forcefully deprived of their natural rights, and crushed beneath the heel of a lawless oppression; should have no words of pity for the helpless victims of the wrong, none of rebuke for the authors and abettors of it; that the *pulpit* should have none!— standing in the name of Him whose commandment is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” expanded from its Hebrew limitations into “Love one another as I have loved you,”— made thus, as well he called it, “a *new* commandment,” alike in the breadth and depth of its meaning.

Consider its meaning,— the breadth of it,— “that ye love one another.” The Jew loved his own,— those of his own lineage, people, brotherhood, church. The Gentiles were “dogs:” the Samaritans, though included in the same national boundaries, were hated

and despised. The Jew was not so different in this from men of other lands and later days. The world still loves "its own." What barriers do differences of nationality, caste, condition, color, interpose to the outflow of our love! Did Christ mean it so? He has answered that question in the parable of the Samaritan. He has answered it on the cross. Fraternity, with him, was more than consanguinity. Neighborhood was more than juxtaposition. "The neighbor was the suffering man, though at the farthest pole." *Humanity* he loved. "He died for *all*."

Consider, again, its meaning,—the depth of it,—"that ye *love* one another." Did he mean by "love" a barren sentiment,—a feeling whose only fruit is verbal, unpractical, deedless? Happily, we are not left to question what he meant. "As I have loved you" decides it. His love was heartfelt sympathy; it was helpful service; it was life-giving devotedness. "He died for all."

And now let us take this "new commandment" of the world's Teacher and Exemplar, at whose tribunal we all must stand,—are standing now,—by whose law are judged; this "*new commandment*," and yet which is but a fulfilling of that thundered from Sinai, but an illumined transcript of that whispered in the universal heart; let us take it, and confront with it the fact before us,—that dark, dread fact, growing darker and more dreadful with every year and month,

— those millions of the enslaved on our soil to-day, helpless victims of human passion, greed, avarice, lust; made so, kept so, by a nation's power, and an acquiescent public opinion; decreed by a nation's judiciary to have "no rights which white men are bound to respect;" millions, with us in all the attributes of an intellectual, moral, social, religious nature; for whom, as much as for us, God meant his choicest gifts, and, among them, that which makes so many of his other gifts alone of worth, alone of access,—*freedom*; for whom, as much as for us, Christ came and died; whom, as much as us, he loves; yea, with whom he chose to identify himself, saying, "Inasmuch as ye do it or do it not" (the needed favors in your power to do) "to such as these, ye do it, or not, unto me."

Tell me, can you gather here as Christian believers, can you accept this volume as containing the will and law of Heaven, and say that these have no claim on you for the action, sympathy, consideration, speech, whereby you may possibly serve them; no claim on you to do whatever you may, consistently with other claims, to lift the yoke of their oppression, to return them their stolen "birthright,"—if that can be called *stolen* which they never had,—and allow them to feel the dignity of self-ownership, the dignity, and the incentives, and the privileges, and the chances? Can you say, in this religious light, in hearing of the Christian call, in sight of the

Christian guide, in hearing of the advent song of Bethlehem, soon again to be sung in all our churches, — “good-will to men ;” in sight of the closing act on Calvary, where good-will to men could no further go ; can you say that the case of these hapless bond-men is no concern of yours ; is not for you to act for, or consider, or be troubled about ?

I know not how it is, kind friends. I do not claim, God knows, to have a warmer heart than others, or a truer. I do not believe I have. I see those around me now to whom I look up, in respect and love, for their kindness of heart and generosity of deed, and yet who do not feel as I do on this subject. I have, probably, touched no chord within their breasts by my appeal. There are women, the kindest of mothers, who, when they sing their babes to sleep, and put their hearts into that “good-night” kiss, and turn away in the unfearing security that no hand but God’s can take them from their arms, have no thought for her, who, with heart no less tender than their own in its maternal instincts, with sensibilities no less attuned to love’s sweet music, stands within the slave-mart, in the agony that only a mother’s heart can know, and looks for the last time on those whom God has given her, not because death has taken them,— she could feel almost happy if that were all,— but because she must witness their living burial in the pit of slavery, with not even the satisfaction of knowing

how dark and deep their descent shall be; — takes her parting look; feels, for the last time, their warm breath against her cheek; and then gazes after them, as, with reverted faces and sobbing wail, they go, until sight and hearing have lost their hold of them, and she sinks in a despair which finds no sympathy but with God, no restorative but time.

There are mothers, fathers, who are touched to tears in the knowledge of a bereavement come to others, by death, of a beloved daughter, measuring the sorrow of those parental hearts by what their fond affections tell them would be their own, should she, sitting beside them in the sweet charm of opening womanhood, be taken thus; who are touched by the mere recital of such a loss, though the parties were strangers to them, ay, though the case were known as fiction; and who yet have no tears and no thought for those who see, in the growing beauty which God has stamped on form and feature of their maiden child, but the *signet of her doom*, — a doom darker than death, and against which they cannot lift an opposing finger; they dare not lift a protesting appeal.

There *are* those, we well know, in all our communities, who wilfully shut out the whole subject of slavery from their minds; who will not give it a fair hearing, nor any hearing, if they can help it. There are those, we know, who defend it, — on the ground

of the alleged inherent inferiority of the African race; of the averred condition of the slave, as physically comfortable; of the precedents for slavery which the Bible furnishes; of the benefits, in point of civilization and Christianization, which slavery confers on its benighted victims. There are these! Let them be. Of course, the appeal of slavery's victims and slavery's wrongs would be of no avail with such. It is of *others* that I ask why it should so greatly be so, in my utter inability to understand it. The commercial consideration, I know, is strong, very strong, in and about our cities; which says "Hush!"—for business' sake. The prejudice against color is strong, making the same circumstances less affecting as attaching to a negro than to a white man. The fear of disunion is strong; which says, "At all costs, that must be prevented." Respect for constitutional obligations is strong; which says, "It is in the *bond* that slavery shall be tolerated: it should be." The inertia of conservatism is strong; which says, "Let alone; things will work themselves right: in trying to hasten matters, you may only make bad worse." The prejudice against abolitionism is strong, allowing the attention to be turned aside, by what are called its exaggerations and fanaticisms, from a fair consideration of the subject. I know all this, and more. But it does not explain to me the failure, to the extent to which it is apparently true, of the antislavery appeal. I can un-

derstand that considerations like these should serve to deaden, in some degree, its force; but *not* that, at times, in view of the simple facts on which that appeal is based, the native sentiments of the soul should not heave the superincumbent mass, and flame out and up, forgetful of every thing but justice and mercy.

And I confess that I am forced at times, in view of the public apathy before the facts of slavery's inhumanity and wrong, the seemingly utter obliviousness to the claims of its victims to a consideration and regard, to ask, "Is all humanity gone from us in this direction? Is the milk of human kindness dried up within us? the sentiment of justice paralyzed?" Where shall we find any marked public recognition — any that is not shamefully inadequate — of the cruelty and crime of slavery, — our own slavery, the pet child of this American republic, — where, away from the abolition platform? Bless God it is *there*; though more is there which I wish were not. But *this* is there, — an open-mouthed plea for the slave, an open-mouthed condemnation of the wrong that makes him such. And none can tell how broad and deep — broadening and deepening — the influence for right and freedom and humanity which has gone forth from those earnest and devoted men and women.

Not, indeed, that such plea and condemnation are, literally, unheard elsewhere. But from how few

among the many pulpits of the land, from how few among its presses, from how few among its public men, is heard a bold, earnest, whole-souled expression of the Christian view and the Christian feeling,—the *humane* view,—in relation to this subject! One might reasonably suppose, that in a community like this, beneath the full blaze of gospel light from its beginnings; with such a history, revolutionary, puritanic,—its souls would be all aflame at the near presence, within the confederacy of which it forms a part, of four millions of human beings bound in the most abject form of bondage the world has known. How sadly far from it! I looked in vain in the applauded speech of a distinguished individual in Faneuil Hall, on Thursday last (I name it as an indication, and not as a personality), for the slightest evidence of a single heart-throb for the slave, of a single throe of righteous indignation at the crime of slavery. There were eloquent invocations of sympathy for the imperilled slave-owner,—imperilled as a consequence of a Heaven-defying sin against humanity; but none, no word of sympathy, no verbal remembrance, of those millions so *sinned against*. There were most earnest deprecations of bloodshed by servile insurrection; but no allusion to the blood daily shed by the wearing, wasting over-toil in cane-field and rice-swamp. None, of course, would object to the invocation of sympathy for the South. God knows,

as itself knows, how large its claim for it. They are our brethren there, our "neighbors." We are to show them the love both of sympathy and of service; but *not*, I protest, *not* to the forgetfulness of the *victims* of their oppression. *They* are no less our brethren, no less our neighbors; *more* entitled to our sympathy and service for their very ignorance and weakness and long-endured abuses. Which would Christ, think you, have soonest remembered? We should sympathize with the South; but as we do with those who are reaping the natural and inevitable fruits of their transgression. It has sown the wind to reap the whirlwind. It has seeded its soil with violence; and what but violence, unless hindered by a repentant righteousness, can spring upon it? Are the laws of the moral universe abrogated or suspended in favor of this republic? We should sympathize with the South; not, indeed, in Pharasaic assumption, as if we were the unsinning and the true, — God forbid! our own self-convicted hearts forbid! — but as those who verily are not guiltless of our brothers' blood, in so far as, by act or influence, wilfully or thoughtlessly, individually or collectively, we may have aided or consented to the inhumanity and the wrong; as those who are sharing, and are yet to share more largely, of its bitter fruits; and who are ready, in the spirit of a fraternal good-will, to unite in any effort, which conscience can approve, for its

abolishment. But let us not mock the Eternal Justice by consenting to palter with it, to palliate it ; to be, for friendship's sake, or interest's sake, or safety's sake, any longer, however indirectly, its willing and unprotesting upholders. The chief ground of fear for the North at this juncture — what is it ? That by its honest-hearted sympathy with an heroic man, who, in the name of God, assailed their institution, it may provoke the South to disunion ? Is it not rather, far rather, that for the sake of the Union, in self-interest or timidity, it will consent to farther concessions of its principles and its manhood ; increasing thus, how surely, the real evil ; debauching yet more the public conscience ; delaying a reckoning which must needs come, only to make it the more overwhelming at last ?

The word, I feel, which God is speaking to the slaveholders of this land and their abettors, through that most remarkable event which has so startled them, from that scaffold in whose blood they seek in vain to stifle their alarm, — that word is “Repent, reform.” And that word — as God’s, not its own ; not in arrogance, not in passion — should the North take up, as the burden and spirit of its appeal. It is the kind word, the friendly word, the saving word. But, heeded or unheeded by the South, with the North should be the unalterable decision, We will no longer be partners in the upholding and cherishing of

this accursed barbarism. We will no longer be tied up to a complicity in this intolerable outrage and affront to Christianity and the age.

Let us remember, friends, that this impersonality, "the North," is composed of individuals; that we are among them; that, as such, we have duties in relation to this matter of slavery, which it becomes us religiously to fulfil. And, first, we should acquaint ourselves — it is the bounden duty of every one of us, man and woman — with the facts of slavery, to the extent practicable. How many never read a publication, never hear a lecture, touching this subject! They are without the true feeling about it, because without knowledge. We should cherish the feeling which knowledge would beget, not morbidly, not fanatically, but in natural, healthy, Christ-like sympathies for the wronged, and in holy detestation of the wrong. It is the very spirit of God. Quench it not. We should give action to the heart's promptings in doing whatever and all we may, in and through the spirit of Christ, for slavery's downfall and extinction. And, withal, we should give ourselves to prayer, — for the oppressed, for the oppressor, for light, strength, compassion, patience, as our own need with regard to them; the prayer of faith and trust in Him, who, amid clouds and darkness, has justice and judgment as the habitation of his throne; all whose attributes are one in their opposition to oppression; and who,

sooner or later, will show himself to have been on the side of truth and freedom and right, in the ever-waging conflict of these with falsehood and despotism and iniquity.

The work is God's. We can be but his instruments: we *can* be such. "Wherefore, put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."



